

Public Hearing – March 22, 2021
Planning and Development Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Katie S. Dykes

House Bill No. 6642 - An Act Concerning a Study of Access to Municipal Owned Beaches and Parks Adjacent to Marine or Tidal Waters.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding House Bill No. 6642 - An Act Concerning a Study of Access to Municipal Owned Beaches and Parks Adjacent to Marine or Tidal Waters. This bill directs the Office of Policy and Management and the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to conduct of study of ordinances and fees associated with public beaches and parks adjacent to marine or tidal waters and submit a report.

DEEP supports the concept of expanding access to beaches and to the coast generally, as public access has been a cornerstone of our coastal management program since 1980, and thus, supports the investment of time and staff resources needed to commence the study and draft the report that is provided for in this bill. Long Island Sound is recognized as Connecticut's most important natural and cultural resource, but the general public cannot be expected to understand or support efforts for its preservation unless the public can go to the shore and experience it.

DEEP is familiar with issues concerning residency restrictions at public beaches and parks, which were highlighted during the summer of 2020 as many sought the relief of a visit to a beach or park during a time when other forms of recreation were not available due to the pandemic. Municipal residency restrictions, however, are not the only factor keeping the general public away from the shore. Many public access sites have been obtained through state and municipal regulatory processes and may be located on easements or other privately controlled locations that are not always maintained to optimize public use. Moreover, the policies of the state Coastal Management Act are not as clear and explicit in promoting public access to municipal beaches as they could be. Accordingly, DEEP would respectfully suggest that the Committee consider expanding the scope of the study called for in this bill to include potential other statutory changes necessary to enhance and encourage general public access to Connecticut's shoreline.

We would be pleased to work with members of the Committee on making the language of this bill more inclusive. DEEP appreciates the Committee for raising a bill that discusses public access to publicly owned coastal resources for all the residents of our state.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact James Albis at James.Albis@ct.gov.